

Diabetes: Prevention and Awareness

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Nearly 26 million Americans have diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, another 79 million adults have prediabetes, a condition that increases their chances of developing Type 2 diabetes. One out of four people with diabetes are unaware that they have it. If left undiagnosed or untreated, diabetes can lead to serious health problems such as heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, stroke amputation, and even death.



The damage from diabetes occurs when blood sugar (glucose) levels are above normal and a hormone called insulin is not able to help the glucose get into the cells. Insulin is produced by the pancreas and helps the cells of the body use glucose which gives our body energy. When the cells cannot uptake glucose, the glucose stays in the blood stream.

There are two types of diabetes. Type I diabetes is often called juvenile onset or insulin dependent diabetes. In Type I diabetes, the pancreas does not produce insulin and insulin is always needed for treatment. With Type 2 diabetes, the pancreas can make insulin, but the cells do not use insulin well. Due to this resistance to insulin, the ability of the pancreas to produce insulin can decrease over time. When this happens, the individual may be prescribed oral medications and/or insulin injections in addition to recommendations for diet monitoring and increasing physically activity.

Risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include being overweight, lack of physical activity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use, increasing age, and women who have had gestational diabetes. Individuals of African ancestry, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Asian American or Pacific Islander are more at risk.

The onset of type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed by lifestyle modifications such as maintaining a healthy weight or by being more physically active and making healthy food choices. Talk to your physician regarding guidelines and recommendations for screening and diagnosis. The following websites can provide more information and support:

National Diabetes Education Program <http://ndep.nih.gov/>

American Diabetes Association <http://www.diabetes.org/>

